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“RACE SUICIDE” AND COMMON SENSE.

BY PATERFAMILIAS.

I AM going to express some convictions, based on experience, concerning the recent revival of interest in large families caused by the publication of a book by two women, with a preface by President Roosevelt, in which he issued his ukase against “race suicide.” I have read the book very earnestly and confess to great disappointment. It is the well meant attempt of two women, born and reared in an atmosphere of wealth and luxury, to enter the domain of the wage-earner, with which, and its many and intricate problems they were unfamiliar, and, after a few days or weeks of observation and experience, express not only their ideas of certain great and fundamental problems, but, in addition, on the basis of slight and undigested data, to issue a document of extraordinary character in which the entire social and business organization of the country is attacked. I do not dispute the facts they allege. These could be duplicated a thousand times. But facts must be studied in relation to other facts. Deductions are drawn which to me are entirely inconclusive, and which betray ignorance concerning the fundamentals of social life and the history of its development. I have for many years been laboring privately and publicly in the interests of many kinds of social reform, and I find that our worst enemies are the emotional people who, in an earnest desire to help us, make statements which are either false or are based on information so slight as to be negligible. In any event, I cannot see how raising more children is a cure for the many undoubted existing evils, certainly not for those expressly stated in the book in question.

I should not, however, have paid much attention either to the book or to the prefatory letter of endorsement by the President, had it not been that almost daily of late there has been published

a letter from the President to some parent of a large family, congratulating him on the number of his offspring, and giving expression to sentiments of one sort or another which, in their essence, amount to this: that the nearer Americans approach the physical status of rabbits the more patriotic they become. If their meaning is not misunderstood by the public, these letters indicate an ignorance of actual conditions in this country, which is all the more regrettable in the man who is the chief servant of the nation, and whose opinions have so much weight not only in legislation but in directing public sentiment.

The President's plain meaning is, that the larger the family the better, regardless of almost any other conditions. "This is the stuff that good Americans are made of," he says in a recent letter. In its last analysis, this means that women are to be judged by no other standard than the number of children they produce. The mother of twenty-four children is a high-priestess of the race: the mother of none is a cipher. Apparently, according to this doctrine, virginity is a crime; and, since reproduction is the sole aim, it does not appear that the marriage relation need be considered as absolutely necessary. I am aware that this is not what the President means, and that he would not stand for such a proposition a moment; but I claim that it is a possible deduction from his philosophy.

I was raised in an atmosphere where it was considered that the teachings of the ancient writers of the Bible are as binding in our day as in theirs, in certain respects. I remember that, although I was taught that every word in the Bible was written by the finger of God and should be implicitly obeyed, there were certain things which we constantly violated. For instance, we ate pork, which, I noticed, was expressly prohibited; but I was put off with the explanation that these things concerned the Jews only. I never found exactly, though I tried to find, which of the things enjoined in the Pentateuch were binding on the Jews and not on us, nor by what principle the differentiation was to be made.

But I grew up believing, as did the great mass of the people of the country at that time, in certain selected texts and precepts; and among these the order to "multiply and replenish the earth" was believed and practised. There were large families in my day, and children were habitually referred to as "gifts from the Lord"; but I remember that the men did not seem to be par-

ticularly happy after three or four had appeared, and that the lives of the women, even those who were of education and refinement, were often almost on a level with those of the slave.

I have not forgotten the day when there were women of culture and refinement who had ten children, who did most of the sewing and housework, and when, if there was more than a single servant in the family, it was a notable thing. I can remember that the lives of those women were lives of pain, anxiety and toil. I cannot remember in my youth a woman of thirty who was not accounted old, and I have verified this many times by looking over family albums. Women of thirty to-day, whether married or single, are considered young, and there are plenty who at the age of forty-five have the bloom and beauty of youth. That was something unknown in my boyhood; and it is unknown in a great portion of this country to-day, more's the pity!

The problems that confront the married pair of to-day are essentially different from those of thirty years ago—not to say a century ago, when the ambition of most married people was said to be to get “an acre of land and a baby a year.” Cradles no longer are included in the equipment of the bride. The young couple who get married to-day must meet the problems that face themselves, and not those which met their ancestors whom they are urged to emulate. The social problem is the greatest. It is of no sort of use to deny that, rightly or wrongly, there is at present a scale of living adopted in all grades of society that is far more expensive than that which prevailed a generation ago. I do not refer so much to the rich, or the well-to-do, but the grade of society where the man of very limited means has occupied and expects to occupy a position of comfort and enjoyment. Much of the increase is due to modern inventions, and to the relative cheapness of what were once esteemed luxuries but are now looked on as merely the common comforts. Partly, the result is due to the fact that woman has become “emancipated,” and, instead of being solely and only a “breeder of sinners,” has launched out into many vocations and has become a wage-earner. The woman who can earn money can spend it. That is a proposition so self-evident that I do not care to enlarge on it, especially to married men. It is true that, in many instances, the money thus earned is devoted to the most laudable purposes, such as the support of dependent relatives; but, in the majority of cases, it is

spent on the women or girls themselves, and it is spent principally for personal adornment. This is not in my opinion a crime. In an age when the love for the beautiful is growing, when the public taste for the best things is being rapidly developed, it is not at all to the discredit of any person to wish to be well-clothed and to make a good appearance. In fact, this is the natural condition which long had general acceptance. It was repressed, so far as Anglo-Saxons are concerned, to a very great extent, by the Puritan domination which was so long exercised all over this country, and from which we are just now becoming emancipated.

I am glad the emancipation has come. I can remember when my mother did not have, on an average, one new dress a year, and when a really nice one was supposed to last for ten. She had been reared in a home of comfort, but she married a clergyman of great spiritual qualities and little earning power, and she was offered up as a constant sacrifice on the altar of family development. I do not say that she regretted having a large family. She would not willingly have spared one of her loved ones; but I do know that some of them were not wanted at the time they came, and that twelve years of constant child-bearing reduced her to the physical wreck which she has remained for thirty years. Yet she was looked upon in her younger days as the typical wife and mother. I can testify that she was so in all the virtues; but that she suffered untold agonies, and does to this day, for the sake of bringing a large brood into the world, is undoubted.

The young couple who get married in the city or the small village at this day have become accustomed to many things with which they are not willing to part. They have learned to dress well, to have expensive pleasures, the theatre, concerts, visits, and the like, which have been inspirations in their lives. They do not look forward to a life of self-sacrifice. They want to retain these things. They have had a little home fitted up, and they do not want to give it up; and as usually the husband has all he can do to support two there is little anxiety to increase the number. If one or two children are born, it is considered enough among those who are intelligent and even tolerably educated. There is no room for more, because, in the first place, there is no money, and because the wife does not want to care for more. If she has a single servant, she finds that her whole time must be taken up with the children; and if she is to have a large brood, she will

either have to give up all expectation of living in the social atmosphere of her friends or the family will be plunged into debt. The result is, that families are small and are growing smaller. The wives are no longer pack-mules, but are getting some of the comforts of life. Why shouldn't they?

This is not the time or place to go into a broad discussion of the function of the sexual relation which is the basis of society. That has been set forth at great length by biologists, and receives more attention now from sociologists than at any other time. If the relations between the sexes were absolutely unrestrained, we should have a much larger number of children born than at present, though fewer would probably survive. If the sexual relations between husbands and wives were unrestrained, the same would be true in only less measure. We all know that as a matter of fact such is not the case. Is this wrong?

The President says it is, and constantly impresses his views on the public. There have been a few voices raised in approbation, but not one among them is a woman's. On the contrary, many protests have been made, and notably by the sex which is urged to bear all the burdens of over-population.

We may as well discuss this proposition from a common sense point of view. It is well known from vital statistics that the greatest mortality occurs among infants less than five years old. This is due to several causes—to diseases peculiar to infants, to prenatal influences, to lack of proper care and nourishment consequent upon poverty; but the fact is that in any large family there are almost always a number of deaths before the children reach maturity. It may be said, therefore, to be mathematically certain that in any large family there are some babies born only to die very soon. That is not an encouraging thought to any parent. On the other hand, it is true to a mathematical demonstration that, where an income is fixed, and in the great majority of cases in this country the income seldom increases, the whole must be divided among the greater number to the loss of those who were present before the new children came. It used to be said that it did not cost anything to raise a baby, but that on the contrary it was an investment. Such a proposition can no longer be maintained. Every baby costs a great deal of money. If the father is in any way able, he gets a good physician and a competent nurse—a trained nurse if possible; while all sorts of sanitary and

other preparations must be made and maintained which involve expense. Each baby cramps a little all that have come before it, with the result that the mother and father are soon obliged to sacrifice themselves almost entirely on the family altar. They must give up their comforts and pleasures; the mother must give up often even the necessities of life and take up its worst burdens in order that the children shall not suffer. A death in the family is a double calamity, since the extortionate cost of modern burial is one of the crying evils, but one which cannot be ignored.

It makes me sick to look at friends of mine who ten years ago were young and happy, and are now prematurely old and wan and sad. The young fellow who used to have the elastic step and the bright laugh, is now gaunt and dyspeptic, and has populistic views of life. His wife who was such a pretty girl, whom we all liked so well, who played and sang so nicely and was the charm of any social gathering, now looks like a little old hen. Her face is careworn, her look is haunted; she betrays every evidence of being drained mentally, physically and spiritually, to minister to four of five youngsters who must have "the best" of things, and who are lucky to get enough to make a decent appearance.

I presume that I am as fond a father as ever lived. I have four children; and if any of them were not welcome when they came, not one of them would be spared on any account. It happens that we are able to care for four, not quite in the style in which two could have been maintained, but to all intents and purposes quite well enough for them, and sufficiently well for us to maintain our social position, which is very dear to us, though to some such a statement may seem folly. If a time should come when we had to give up our present style of living (which, practically, means our friends, since in that event we would not and could not continue present relations with them), I would consider it, perhaps, the most serious day of my life. So far as can be judged at present, the only thing that might threaten such an event would be the appearance say of a couple of more children. I presume there are those who will think that this is an ignoble statement; but it is not only true, but it is true of about every family of which I have any personal acquaintance, except in those rather numerous instances where there are no children at all. Nothing is sadder to me than a large family except one with no children at all. I am not in favor of race suicide, but I claim that the man who

raises two, three or four children is doing all that ought to be expected of him, and probably in most cases a little more.

Why?

Because I foresee that what has taken place industrially in the last thirty years or less is going to continue increasingly. The race for existence is going to be harder and the difficulties in the way are going to become much greater. As the great industrial and mercantile businesses of the country are constantly accumulating in the hands of a few corporations, it seems likely that less and less will a young man have a chance in life in a business of his own. If he is to be anything more than a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, it must needs be that he become fitted for the race in the best manner possible. Perhaps his best chance will be with the great corporations where only experts are wanted in the paying positions. It is even now a difficult question for the man with a fairly good income—say five thousand dollars in the cities and two thousand in the villages—to provide for a family of four children and give them the social status, intellectual atmosphere and educational advantages which shall fit them for the swift race now in progress; and there is every reason to believe that the race is going to be harder in the future. If this is so, it simply means that bringing more children into the world than we can properly care for, means death for some and a state of social degeneracy for the rest; or, at best, careers in which there will be nothing but a constant struggle, with the chances very much against them.

In point of fact, I have yet to see any reason in the world for a man bringing into the world a larger number of children than he is able to care for. On the contrary, there is every reason against this course. I am aware that there are many persons in the country who think that the sexual relation is a function designed solely for the propagation of the human race, and that nothing whatever should be allowed to interfere with this manifest purpose.

I deny this.

I deny it on the ground that it is a mere assumption, for which there has never been adduced the least proof. I deny it on the ground that it is contrary to human experience. I deny it on the ground that, although the marriage relation is designed partly for the propagation of the race, such is not its chief function, since the same result can be attained without marriage, and

originally was so attained. I hold that marriage is mainly for the highest good of the two individuals concerned, and that the rearing of children is only incidental and to be considered only as it adds to their happiness. I deny that marriage is solely an institution for the promotion of self-sacrifice and misery and the propagation of children. If so, it is a failure. It is an institution to make all happy, and not to make slaves of parents at the very outset of maturity. My observation and experience have been that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, in large families there has been an immense amount of suffering and privation, and that the mother has usually had to bear the greater portion of it. And the worst of it is, the fact that the large family has so many drawbacks, which are freely avowed by every member of it, does not prevent each member of that same family from getting married under circumstances which usually indicate an exact reproduction of the ills of which they have so long complained.

But people will say: Look at France!

Well, look at France! I have not only looked at her from a theoretical point of view, but have travelled over her soil pretty thoroughly.

It seems to me that the French are about the happiest people I know—and I do not refer to Paris, but to the other cities, the villages and the country. It seems to me that the French are the most frugal and comfortable people I know, and they just barely succeed in reproducing the race without any increase at all. I do not see why the Frenchman should be contrasted with the rabbit, to the discredit of the former. I have never noticed in history that large families and intellectual and moral development seemed to go together. Until some better example than France can be brought along, I shall feel confirmed in my views.

The last word I have to say is the most important. I am against large families principally on account of the women, who are compelled to bear most of the burdens of life, and who are asked to give up all the comforts which they crave and which in some measure they are beginning to enjoy, and to which they are justly entitled. I consider it brutal to reiterate constantly that child-bearing is woman's function. I consider it no less than brutal to ask a woman to relegate herself to the position of a brood-mare, not for the personal happiness of either man or wife, but simply that the aggregate number of human beings in the world may be

increased. I do not think that a large population in and of itself is a great blessing. In all things in the world I am concerned more with quality than quantity. It is certain that, if the President were to have his way and we were to have as many children in each family as he seems to think desirable, and they could be brought up to maturity, the time would soon come when they would scarcely have standing room. The country could not support them.

In fact, we are getting quite as many people now as we need, unless we are going to be a military nation. I do not like to compare the President's expressions in his letters with the brutal sayings of Napoleon about the necessity of Frenchwomen breeding soldiers; but there is altogether too much of a resemblance to suit me. I have for the President the greatest respect and have always supported him politically, and I cannot believe that he wants to see the population of this nation grow simply because it will give us military strength. The fact is that we need better citizens, not more of them; and until there has been some way provided by which every child born into this world has as good a chance as it ought to have in the race for success, I shall continue to hold to the opinion that the fewer there are in the family the better. President Roosevelt has a large family, but he has always had abundant means to care for them. If he could know the sufferings of poor women, I do not believe he would encourage poor men to increase their families. I do not believe one woman has been convinced by what he has said on this subject. I believe in that married life where there is happiness for all, and I have little faith in the theory that if a man marries early, works and worries himself to death he may thus obtain a better position hereafter. I am certain that we ought to treat our wives better than we do. Most of us are moral cowards, who make our wives suffer and then blame it on the Lord, who, I believe, will resent such conduct. I have said some plain things because they need to be said. I cannot agree with the President, whose philosophy, if it seems brighter, is yet in truth responsible for a large part of the misery there is in the world.

PATERFAMILIAS.